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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001999

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SUBJECT: UAE Foreign Minister on Paris Donors' Conference, Iran, and Lebanon

Refs: (A) State 163955
(B) Abu Dhabi 1987
(C) State 162558 and State 165967
(D) Abu Dhabi 1960
(E) State 166405
(F) State 163545

Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons sections 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a one-on-one meeting with Ambassador December 13 afternoon, Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed (AbZ) covered regional issues, including support for the Palestinian Authority, the Iranian President's appearance at the recent GCC Summit, the NIE, and the need to encourage rapid Lebanese presidential elections. END SUMMARY.

DECEMBER 17 PARIS CONFERENCE,
SUPPORTING THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

¶2. (C) AbZ said that Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs Anwar Mohammed Gargash would represent the UAE at the December 17 Paris Conference on support for Palestinian reform and capacity building. AbZ expressed regret that he would not be able to attend and meet with the Secretary, explaining that he will be with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed on a long-arranged official visit to Tokyo. He agreed that the need for direct budgetary cash support to the PA was urgent, but declined to reveal a dollar figure for UAE's contribution. Ambassador noted UAE's generosity in supporting the PA in the past (\$80 million in May 2007 and \$55 million in 2006). When pressed, AbZ reported that Gargash was under instruction not to talk numbers in Paris unless Saudi Arabia came forward with a specific pledge amount. Ambassador underscored the urgent PA cash requirements provided ref A.

¶3. (C) Referring to earlier conversations, Ambassador asked what was happening with AbZ's idea that Arab League pledges be brought to Paris for follow-up. AbZ noted that the idea of turning over Arab League pledges would make the World Bank, rather than internal Arab League mechanisms, responsible for exposing the failure of "certain states" to avoid making good on their pledges. Action on this idea would be held until the March 2008 Arab League Summit in Damascus, however. There was real concern that much of what had been pledged by Arab League states never made it to the intended recipients, said AbZ. He had spoken with the Kuwaitis and the Bahrainis about such an arrangement for Arab League pledges, said AbZ, and had sensed some interest on the part of these Gulf neighbors. The Paris conference

was important to give the Palestinians hope. The Foreign Minister noted his November 22 meeting with QSE Tony Blair in Abu Dhabi, during which AbZ had urged that attention be focused on developing quick-impact, specific projects. AbZ added that he appreciated the update on the Administration's funding requests to the Congress for PA support.

15. (U) Bio Details on Anwar Gargash: Gargash has been Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs since February 2006. He received his BA and MA in Political Science from George Washington University and his PhD in Political Science from Kings College (Cambridge), writing his PhD dissertation on the subject of strategic approaches of smaller states to larger neighbors. He is fluent in English, is of Persian heritage, and is married to an American.

IRAN, NIE, AND LEVINSON

16. (C) AbZ reiterated UAE's displeasure with Qatar at the handling of the recent GCC Summit. While the Qataris had invited the Iranian President "as a surprise," President Khalifa had felt uncomfortable at the way his interaction with Ahmedinejad had been "engineered" by Doha. AbZ said that he had been irked himself when he saw that he had been seated next to Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki at the GCC Summit dinner. Ahmedinejad had not seriously engaged on Gulf security issues, said AbZ. Nonetheless, there had been interest in what Ahmedinejad had to say about Iranian gas for the Gulf region, as well as his talk of water projects. There had been less interest on the part of the GCC participants regarding Ahmedinejad's description of a proposed Iranian trade "corridor" between Central Asia and the Gulf.

17. (C) Ambassador noted that she had notified AbZ's deputy, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed al Sha'ali, of the contents of

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the National Intelligence Estimate non-paper on December 3 while AbZ was in Doha. She noted that the Embassy had since followed up with several key UAEG interlocutors (refs C, D). AbZ said that he and others in the UAE leadership had heard that Israel had received a "heads-up" regarding the contents of the NIE before countries in the Gulf had been briefed. AbZ wondered whether this was true. It would be disappointing if this was so, he continued. He hoped the United States realized that UAE and other Gulf countries had the most to lose if Iran gained a nuclear weapon, perhaps even more to lose than Israel.

18. (U) Ambassador also shared the information contained in ref E non-paper on American citizen Robert Levinson with AbZ. The Foreign Minister agreed to follow up via the UAE Embassy in Tehran.

LEBANON

19. (C) Ambassador raised points contained ref F on encouraging rapid Lebanese presidential elections without condition. AbZ said he had spoken to several contacts in Beirut this week who had confirmed that tensions were running high given yet another postponement of the parliamentary vote. He deplored the assassination of Brigadier General Francois al-Hajj the day before. AbZ noted that the UAE had expressed its condemnation in the statement issued by the GCC Secretary General, characterizing the attack as a heinous crime that

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targeted the security and stability of Lebanon as well as its unity. AbZ said he found it curious that the Department's public statement on the al-Hajj car bombing had not specifically mentioned Syria. Although there was speculation that Sunni extremists or internal Lebanese Armed Forces struggles might be at fault, AbZ emphasized his belief that Syria was to blame and listed the numerous anti-Syrian figures who had been targeted in the past few years. (Note: The GCC statement does not mention Syria, either, although it does call for the Lebanese people to stand together as one front to thwart those who wish to destabilize Lebanon. End Note.)

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